

# ALL ABOUT THE WAR

## The Indian Review War Book

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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—  
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# INDIA'S UNTOUCHABLE SAINTS.

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AUTHOR OF

'HINDU PSALMS AND HYMNS'

PRICE AS. SIX

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## NOTE.

In this book are presented the lives of four notable saints that have sprung from what are called the "untouchable" classes of India. These saints appeared in different parts of the country: Nanda in South India, Ravi Das in Oudh, Chokamela in Maharashtra, and Hari Das Thakur in Bengal. The piety, the devotion and the meekness of these saints have won for them a place in the hearts of the people and their names are household words in the respective provinces. The classes, however, from which these saints came have long been shut out from the religious and social life of the country. But nothing can bring home to us the injustice of the same more vividly than the lives and character of these great souls. It is hoped, therefore, that these lives will be welcomed not only by lovers of religion but also by those who are interested in the cause of these—"untouchables."

## INTRODUCTION

In all the annals of our religion, there are really few more interesting personages than those saints and holy men that have sprung from the "untouchable" classes. Long have these classes been kept in bondage and in darkness. They have long been denied the privileges of learning and worship. They have been shut out from love and social intercourse. They have been despised, ill-treated and kept low. But still, amidst their misery and degradation, some of them have struggled on towards light and won a place for themselves in the annals of our country. The memory of these untouchable saints is still held in reverence and in affection all

over India. They are few in number but their national importance is great.

The stories of these saints, as they have come down to us, are embellished with a few legends and miracles. These legendary anecdotes may sound a little strange in modern ears. We are indeed far removed from that credulous and child-like atmosphere of thought in which these legends took their rise. But beneath these legends, we can easily discern the plain human story of exceeding piety and devotion and unmerited persecution. In the lives of the two saints, Nanda and Chokamela, left us by their poet-biographers, the story of their struggle and piety is delineated with such simplicity and pathos that we can hardly doubt its truth. A few miracles adorn the tale

of races. But early in the Middle Ages the re-arrangement had begun. The manifold elements reconstituted themselves on the basis of provincial nationalities. The vernaculars, the language of the new peoples, began to grow. Over and above the old divisions of caste and race, the newer principle of nationality asserted itself. But these new nationalities consisted not only of the old civilised races and the new war-like tribes but also of the aborigines and the primitive tribes that had been conquered in the distant past and set in the lowest scale of society. The right of the latter to the new life, to participate in the religion and worship of the new peoples, was not better demonstrated than by the lives of these saints.

of the temple. In the huge majestic Nandi, which stands in front of the shrine, we seem to see the great Chola monarch himself kneeling for ever before the God whom he adored. The pious worshipper-king of Madura, caring not for expense or sacrifice, gathered all the skilled sculptors and artists of the land and reared those mighty edifices which adorn the illustrious city of the Pandyas. It was really an age of temples. Kings freely gave their wealth and peasants their labour to rear those mighty edifices to the Gods whom they adored. The large shrine, with its rising sikharas, surrounded by its double or treble rows of towers, attracted and filled the heart of the people. It was the joy of saint and layman, of peasant and war-like chief, alike.



## THE CHERI

Nanda was born in the village of Adanur, in the Tanjore District, a few miles south of the river Coleroon. He was born in the pariah caste which, if ever caste it is, is the lowest of the low. The duty of these pariahs was to till the land, to drag the bodies of dead cattle away from the vicinity of the village, and to look after the burning corpses. Apart from the wages they got as labourers, they made a little profit out of the hide of dead cattle. The dwelling of these men, as is usually the case, was in the cheri, far away from the village. It consists of a few straggling, thatched houses built on low and swampy ground in the midst of wet fields. Nanda's cheri therefore presented the meanest appearance. Small and stag-

those little products of his cheri, cattle and *gorochan*. Nanda would take them to the temple and, laying them at the outer gate, say :  
“ Here is *gorochan* for *abishel* and hide for the temple’s drum ” Returning from his pilgrimage, he would sow and reap with joy. He would tell his mates and castemen of the joy of temples, of the happiness beyond words that waited the worshipper. He would clap his hands and cry “ O come, let us go, dance and pray, and drag the car ” Or when in a higher mood, he would cry “ We pursue fleeting pleasures. The feet of the Lord we have forgotten ”

#### NANDA AND HIS CASTEMEN.

The piety and ecstatic devotion of Nanda only roused the stupidity and the fears of his

village and, standing there at the eastern end, saw the gleaming tower and the shrine. Nanda and his followers prostrated themselves on the ground with joy and, then rising, they folded their hands on their breast and prayed. Nanda however wept. The huge *nandi* in the front of the temple obstructed the sight of the distant image. "O God, though come to Thy shrine, shall I go without seeing Thee? Methinks all my sins have taken shape as *nandi* and stand between Thee and me." With flowing tears he prayed for the holy sight. Tradition loves to assert that God, seeing the saint's devotion, bade the *nandi* move a little. And to this day, it is said, the *nandi* stands a little away from the front of the shrine. Nanda was rejoiced beyond measure and

## CHIDAMBAR.

Days rolled on but Nanda's heart rested not in his cheri. Beyond the Coleroon, on the northern bank, lay Chidambar where Siva's avatar, Nataraja, dwells, made glorious by the songs of poets and bhaktas. Built ages ago by a pious Chola king the shrine had soon attracted to itself the piety and the worship of the Dravidian people. Crowds of pilgrims poured in every year to worship at the shrine. To Nanda, however, it was the very Heaven of Bliss. There Siva dances the Eternal dance for ever, scattering happiness and joy to all worshippers. Nanda yearned to go, to see, to fall flat on the ground and pray. He went round the village and cried

## NANDA AND THE BRAHMIN MASTER

Filled heart and soul with Chidambar,  
Nanda went to his master to crave his permission  
Prostrating before him at a distance, he  
prayed thus

“O Lord, long have I served thee I  
would fain crave your permission to go to  
Chidambar

“Learning have I not, nor have I performed  
any sacrifice or rites My years have rolled  
on swiftly and I have been a worldling to the  
core. Let me go to Chidambar and offer my  
humble tribute of worship to the God of all  
the worlds

“Grant but this my heart's wish Return  
I will and ever do thy bidding and guard thy  
lands.”

Yogis contemplate day and night? Go thou, wretch, to thy cheri, till thy land and worship your stone and devil

“Meet it is that the pure-born and the devout should worship and meditate on God But what has thou, unclean wretch, to do with the Holy Sight?”

Thus insulted, Nanda once more crept back to his village, weeping within himself He cast his eyes to the North, to the Heavens, but there was no hope The Brahmin stood hard and implacable He came and passed his days in silence and in tears

The year rolled on and the December festival came round Nanda's heart swelled to think of the bright festival at Chudambar, of the pious crowd, of the holy car, of the song

“O refuse me not my heart's wish    Make me  
not a sinful prey to Death    Send me to Clidam-  
bar, O Lord, with thy, a Brahmin's blessing.”

Nanda was however only rebuked, insulted,  
beaten and sent back with the order—“Forty  
vels he idle and untilled    Go and till them”  
The poor saint's misery was now full to the  
brim, and it found vent in noble words

“Alas ! that I should be born the slave of this  
Brahmin, crimes many should I have commit-  
ted to be born thus

“When with tearful eyes and distressed heart  
I ask, he calls me a hypocrite

“He has beaten me to death    My limbs  
bleed, move them I cannot

“Will not this Brahmin's heart melt for me ?  
Ah ! my life trembles at the core,

“ If I but see the temple-tower, the sins of  
lives will be washed away But to the sinful  
is not vouchsafed the sight

“ Hast thou, Merciful God of Chidambar,  
really turned to stone in this, Thy poor pariah's,  
behalf?

“ O God, denied Thy worship, shall I still be  
bound to the wheel of birth and misery?

“ O God, my father and mother Thou art.  
Thou art the soul of my soul O, let me but  
see Thee ”

None can read the story of this struggle  
without a tremor There is, indeed, no tragedy  
more heart-melting, more harrowing than  
this of the outcaste saint Day after day he  
reappears to the Brahmin master, falls at his feet  
and with tears entreats him to grant him leave



to go but once to Chidambar and return But in reply he is only jeered, insulted, beaten The saint pleads his long service He pleads his devotion But the Brahmin feels not The misery of the saint becomes uncontrollable and he cries "Art Thou, God of the Helpless, really turned to stone in thy poor pariah's behalf" History of religion furnishes few parallels to this Sankara with a trumpet voice proclaiming a forgotten faith, Ramanuja preaching, amidst tears, of love and devout worship—all fade by the side of the struggles of this pious, melting soul

Nanda came back to the chert, overcome with sorrow He wept, sang and prayed The order of his master came to his mind, but  
+ stirred him not The plough and the field

angusted him. Sore with grief, he began to torture himself. He ate chewed food and drink. He wept, prayed and sang without intermission. His face and limbs grew pale.

## THE VISION

But his deliverance came at last. One day when, after long prayer and meditation, he laid himself to rest, the God of Chidambaram appeared in a vision and said: "Go to thy master and tell him that all the forty *velis* are ready for harvest. He will grant thy wish and thou wilt come to My temple." Nandi suddenly awoke and ran to the farm, and there with joyous bewildered eyes he saw the fields, which only the previous day lay dry and unploughed, were now miraculously green. Beside himself with joy, from there he ran to his master and

falling at his feet, said "Come, O lord and see thy lands They have all been tilled and sown and now lie ready for harvest Send me to Chidambar with thy blessing " The Brahmin saw and was deeply surprised but soon guessed that it should be the work of God , and falling at the feet of Nanda implored his pardon "Long did I scorn and hate thee Long I impeded thee, I knew thee not Help me O Nanda and save me from punishment " Nanda was however grieved at the Brahmin's words of repentance and supplication and implored him saying "Cease thy words. Thou art my master " But the Brahmin ceased not and said "Cattle, wealth and land make not a man great He alone is great on whom God's grace dwells What availeth learning or birth?"

morning sun Nanda's heart was overcome with joy He cried "This the joyous land—the sacred shrine—which beckons from afar the distressed, doubling soul and gives it bliss" Afar he heard the chime of temple-bells ringing in the distance. It threw Nanda into ecstasies

With quick steps he walked to the southern gate and, there prostrating before the shrine, danced and sang He went round the shrine, came to the eastern gate and fell flat on the ground and prayed He rose up and, again, with song and prayer he went round and round the sacred shrine He chose his resting place on the banks of a tank lying near the southern gate There he would sit and meditate long: and, then, start to his feet

shrine I am a stranger at Thy gate O  
come and take me into Thy temple "

Long he cried thinking on his stain of birth  
which made him a stranger at the gate of his  
Lord The grievous bar broke his heart

" O God, better it is to be a beast or stone  
than a pariah

" When I go out into the streets, people cry,  
' O wretch, keep away ' It breaks my heart

" I cannot stand in the midst of Thy temple  
and, with rapturous heart, sing hymns and  
pray O God, better to be a beast or stone  
than a pariah "

After months of trial and sorrow, the Brah-  
min's ' Yea ' did come But now though close to  
his loved shrine, he could not enter The poor  
saint's heart was indeed deeply shaken. The

trial was too heavy But though he was torn in heart, he failed not in his daily devotions He went on his daily rounds round the temple with song and prayer. He unswervingly adored his God .

“Thou art One and Omnipotent Other than Thee none have I worshipped even in thought Many are my sins Forgive them all and save me” The days rolled on and Nanda resigned himself to fasting and prayer

#### THE MANDATE TO THE BRAHMINS.

One day to his joyous surprise, God himself appeared in his dreams and the words fell from the divine lips “O Nanda, the Brahmins of My shrine will come and purify thee Thou wilt enter My temple” Nanda woke but could not

believe himself "Is this truth or fantasy, Can I, the despised of the world, enter Thy temple and pray ? ' Nanda stood, half doubting, half joyous on the side of the pool By this time God had appeared in dream to all the three thousand Brahmins of Chidambar and bidden them to go to Nanda standing at the southern gate, purify him and admit him into His temple The Brahmins all suddenly awoke and ran into the streets Each stared at the other But true all had dreamt The cry arose "Our God's will be done Let us go, purify the saint and admit him into the temple" So saying they all marched to the southern tower And passing through the tower they saw Nanda, standing by the side of the pool with bare form and devout mien Nanda

too saw them from the distance He was joyed yet humbled—"O Brahmins, approach me not. I am a pariah who eats pig and goat, who drags dead cattle and carries their bone and hide, who looks after the burning corpses"—But the Brahmins replied "What though thou art low in birth, Thou art high in God's grace. Come, purify thyself in the sacred fire and enter the temple."

#### THE PURIFICATION CEREMONY

There itself near the southern tower, below the ramparts, the Brahmins lit the sacred fire Nanda went through the ordeal and came out, they say, a Brahmin clad in sacred thread and robe With the Brahmins, he then went through the tower, passed along the streets, up the steps, into the temple. And thereafter,



sayeth the mediæval chronicle, none saw him  
What this cryptic sentence means, perhaps we  
shall never know But sure it is that long  
and joyously should Nanda have prayed and  
danced that day and that thereafter he lived  
in blessed joy and peace Far from the churi,  
far from the scorn and contempt of the world,  
he was now at the feet of the Lord himself,  
whom he adored night and day

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## II

# Kavi Das.

### THE REFORMATION IN HINDUSTHAN

Medieval Hindusthan witnessed one of the greatest religious movements India has ever known. The times were indeed fit enough for a great change. Kings sat on the throne who were strong to oppress, but not to protect, the people. Anarchy and tyranny cast dark shadows on man's existence. But greater than this was the darkness that had settled on men's souls. Formality and superstition reigned supreme. Faith had grown dim and uncertain. As with one mighty effort India bestirred herself, rallied her strength, and nobly attempted to conquer the realms of faith and freedom.



Ramanand was therefore condemned to live apart from other monks. He was highly incensed at this order, retired from the society itself, and started a new sect of his own. The movement which was thus started by Ramanand was taken up and spread far and wide by the great and intrepid reformer, Kabir Das. He denounced all images and with a trumpet-like voice called on all Hindus and Moslems alike, to worship the "One True, and Living God." The movement spread north, east, and west. Nannak sowed the seeds of a new religion which helped to unite the peasants of the Punjab into a new and vigorous people. Chaitanya in the east taught of a merciful God and the path of Devotion and roused Bengal from its slumber. In Central India



founded a sect confined to his own caste, the Chamars. In the *Bhakti Mala* Ravi Das makes a very important figure. We give below the story as we find it in the authorities.

#### HIS BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE

Ravi Das was born in the lowest of Hindu castes, one of the mixed tribes of India, the *Chamars* or workers in hide and leather. Born to poor parents, he was trained by them to the caste-trade. Ravi Das was from his boyhood of a very devout disposition. While tanning the hide, he would repeat Vishnu's name and pray. The little profits of his trade he divided among the devout.

#### MISFORTUNE AND POVERTY

But suddenly a season of scarcity intervened and the poor Chamar was reduced to great

stres When Vishnu in the guise of an  
 Jinary Vaishnava brought him a philosopher's  
 one and made a present of it to him, Rai  
 as heeded it not and sang— (It has since  
 been verified by Sur Das thus) —

"A great treasure is the name of Hari to  
 e It multiplieth day by day, nor doth  
 ending diminish it

"It abideth securely in the mansion and  
 no thief can steal it

"The Lord is the wealth of Sur Das, what  
 need hath he of the philosopher's stone?"

So saying he threw away the miraculous  
 stone, but still the kind-hearted Vishnu,  
 over of *bhakti*, pressed him with gifts of  
 old till at last the devout and humble  
 Jamar was filled with fear and spiritual alarm.

He was at last directed by a voice from above to apply the wealth to the building of a temple. He did so, made himself the priest thereof and acquired great fame.

#### PERSECUTION AND TRIUMPH

This, however, made him the object of persecution. The Brahmins of the place approached the king and, with uplifted arms, they cried,

"Where sacred things are profanely administered, there three calamities will fall, death, famine, and fear.

'A Chamar, O king, ministers to Vishnu and distributes *prasad* to the people. Banish him, O king, to preserve the honour and religion of thy people."

The king accordingly sent for the daring chamar and asked him to give away the



sacred image and temple to the Brahmins Ravi Das humbly submitted. But by a miracle his worthiness to minister to his God was proved and he was allowed to go in peace. Another victory is recorded of him. The incident is somewhat curious but throws great light on another side of the movement that was now spreading in the land. Among his disciples, Ravi Das numbered Jhali, Rani of Chitor. This, her discipleship to a Chamar, excited a great commotion among the Brahmins of her state. But they were cowed and surprised when, invited to a public feast, they sat down to meal and, between every pair of them, there appeared a Chamar—Ravi Das himself.

Such are the legends which tradition has left us. But as H. H. Wilson says: "Whatever

we may think of their (legends') veracity, their subject-matter and tenor, representing an individual of the most abject class—an absolute out-caste in Hindu estimation—as a teacher and saint, is not without interest and instruction ”

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### III

## Chokamela

The great medieval reformation in Hindusthan had its counterpart in Maharashtra also where it took a most vigorous and magnificent shape. The movement was begun by Dnyandeo who, outcasted at Alandi, boldly proclaimed at Pandharpur that faith was better than sacrifice and rite and attacked the supremacy of the Brahmins by translating the Bhagavad Gita into Marathi. The movement gathered force and produced saints and poets in ever increasing number. The movement was fraught with great importance to Maharashtra. It brought about the social and religious emancipation of the Maratha

people The saints of this movement were many—Brahmins, Sudras, tailors, peasants, and potters But the most remarkable personage of them all was a Mahar by name Chokamela

#### PANDHARPUR

The centre of this movement was a small town on the banks of the Bhuna river Probably an ancient shrine, it did not become famous till the beginning of the 13th century But during the succeeding centuries it exercised the profoundest influence on the piety and devotion of Maharashtra To see and worship the beautiful image of Vitoba, standing arms akimbo on its buck-pedestal in the shrine of Pandharpur, became the dream and joy of every Maratha, saint or layman.

Many and wonderful are the stories that have come down to us of the devotion and piety which the God of Pandharpur evoked in the hearts of the people. A most thrilling story is of that lame saint who crept all the way from Pitan to Pandharpur in order to have a sight of the loved image. The temple itself is not perhaps architecturally great or imposing, but surely every stone of that sacred edifice is fraught with the devotion and piety of thousands upon thousands of Maratha saints and bhakthas.

#### CHOKAMELA

One of the earliest and noblest of Vito-ba's worshippers was this Mahar, Chokamela. His parents were Sudama and Muktabai who

lived at Anagod near Pandharpur. Although they owned more than half the village *valan* lands, they were childless and unhappy. In order to obtain offspring Sudama made many pilgrimages to Pandharpur. One day in his absence it fell to Muktabai to convey two hundred mangoes from the Mahar lands to the Mussalman governor of Bedar to be divided by him. As she walked, a starving Brahmin met her and asked her for some mangoes. Muktabai finding him hungry gave him five mangoes. The Brahmin ate them all and blessed her. "You gave me five mangoes. You shall, therefore, have five children. Call the eldest 'Chokn' because I have sucked (*choknen*) the mangoes." With these words he vanished.



feet and implored him to accept her as his bride. Soon Chokamela abandoned his home at Anagod and took up his residence at Pandharpur in order to be nearer to the God of his worship. As a Mahar, he could not enter the temple. But he prayed continuously to Vitoba from the outer gate. Denied the privilege of the holy sight, he took on himself the humbler duties of a bhakta, he swept the streets and pathways around the temple. Ever meditating on Vishnu and muttering His name, he passed his days in devotion and in prayer. The thought, however, of a Mahar saint was too much even for the followers of Dynauder, cruel persecution befel him.





sees and shrinks not from the low But if He finds no temple in thy mind, though thou mayest be close to His shrine, you yet are far, far apart" That night Vittal himself came and stood by the saint's cottage, then bore him swiftly to His temple-hall, and there taking the saint's hand in His, He confessed that his was the worship that had pleased Him best A temple-priest, who slept outside, awoke and, calling to the other priests, said "See, Chokamela or some other Mahar, sits in the shrine with Vishnu's avatar The outcaste has tracked his prey through the locked doors God is defiled O thrice-cursed deed! Fled is the faith and fouled the Brahmin's creed" They seized the saint and dragg-d him through the door—"Now get ye hence" But Chokamela

softly smiled and said "Now if a Mahar should bathe in the Ganges' tide, will his pollution in her stream abide? Or when the wind sweeps over the plain, is it infected by the outcaste's breath? Base though I be, no evil have I done Him in whose eyes all creeds and castes are one. Indeed, your speech but ill befits the wise." The temple priest with blazing eyes replied "Shall the Mahar unto the twice-born teach? Shall we, the Brahmins, hear sermons from the lowest of the low? The priests all met together and made a remonstrance to the king. The king, a Mussalman, was incensed at the conduct of the low-caste subject. He sent for him and asked "Born in a low caste, how dare you enter the temple of the high?" To which

Choka replied ' God taketh me inside by force. What shall I do? I have long pleaded my stain " The Mussalman governor listened not and ordered him to be tied to a yoke and dragged along the streets After being thus punished the saint was driven from Pandharpur and forced to live beyond the Bhima

#### EVENTUAL TRIUMPH

Though thus driven far from temples, though shamed, abhorred, punished, Chokamela yet prayed to Vittal and built a *dipmala* on the Bhima's other bank which still can be seen One day as he dined beneath a lime-tree's shade, the Dark God joined him, arrayed in His divine robes Chokamela's wife brought curd and served them to the God, but as she served, some bit of curd splashed on Vittal's

robes. The saint rebuked her. "Is it thus you treat the Lord of Heaven when He comes to dine?" There passed along the road a Brahmin priest who heard these words, and deeply shocked, thought that the Mahar had blasphemed the absent God. He sprang forward and before Chokamela could resist, he struck the saint in fury with his fist, then bathed in the Bhima and washed his stain and proudly walked to pray in Vittal's temple. But as he prayed, he saw the stain of curd on God's *pitambur* of priceless silk, His cheek was swollen and tear drops flowed, as if it was He that had felt the cruel blow. The Brahmin saw and knew. Fear filled his breast—"He is the saint and I am a wretch condemned. Even as a hammer might fall on a pearl, I have struck

him whom God loved best" His pride all humbled, the Brahmin crossed the Bhima once more to bring the saint from the other bank He led him back and reached the shrine. And lo ! the hurt cheek healed and over Vittal's face, there spread a smile welcoming the saint's embrace.

#### HIS TRAGIC DEATH

His life, however, ended most tragically. The Governor of Bedar impressed all the Mahars of his province to build a wall round the Mangalwedha town Chokamela was impressed along with the others When the work was nearing its completion, one of the unfinished walls crashed down and smothered a number of Mahar workmen Among the victims was this saint himself For many years his ashes remained unhonoured under the fallen ruin But after

his death, his reputation as a saint increased so greatly that at last the tailor-saint Namdev received at Pandharpur a divine message to carry to Vittoba's shrine the earthly remains of the pious Mahar. In obedience to this order, Namdev went to Mangalwedha. But Chokamela's bones were mingled with those of several hundred fellow-workmen. Namdev was at a loss to identify the bones of Chokamela. At last, placing his ear close to the ground, so runs the story, he heard at one spot the cry of "Vittoba, Vittoba." He then knew that the bones that lay there were Chokamela's. Reverently he collected them and took them to Pandharpur, where a stone erected over them still marks the spot. And there the Mahars now conduct the worship of Vishnu.

## IV

# Haridas.

### THE REFORMATION IN BENGAL

The great religious movement, that was spreading in West and Central India, made its influence felt in Bengal also. Poetry was the first to voice forth the new ideals of Devotion and Love. Jayadeva wove the mystic story of Radha Krishna into one great allegory and song. Chandi Das and Vidyapati were inspired by the same theme and sang in devout strains of the love of Radha and Krishna, thereby inculcating in the minds of the people Love and Devotion to God. Vaishnava monks, too, from the south, imbued with the teachings of Ramanuja and Madhwacharya,



came and settled in Bengal. What with the songs of the poets and what with the preaching of these Vaiṣṇava monks, the new cult of Bhakti and Brotherhood soon spread through the whole of Bengal and raised a host of devotees and bhaktas from all classes of the people. The chief of them all was that great saint of Nadia, Śrī Kṛṣṇa Chaitanya. He was initiated into the new faith by Ishwar Purī, a monk of the order of Madhvacarya. He soon became a monk and made pilgrimages to all the sacred shrines, preaching and singing and holding devout discourse wherever he went. His ecstatic preaching won large numbers of converts and disciples. All the devout and the pious of the land gathered round him. At last Chaitanya settled at Purī, where, with his disciples

and followers, he spent his life in constant adoration of Jagannath.

#### HARIDAS THAKUR

One of the sweetest and the most pious personalities in this devout band was Haridas Thakur, also known as Brahma Haridas. We know very little of the birth or antecedents of this saint. He is reported to have been a Yavana or Mussalman, but, it appears to us, he was only a low-caste Hindu. That he was not born in any of the regenerate castes of the Hindus, and as such, was originally "untouchable" is quite clear. Contemporary references to this saint in the "Life of Chaitanya" and other writings leave no doubt as to the fact that Haridas belonged to the "untouchable" classes. He was born about the latter end

of the fifteenth century and was a very devout worshipper of Vishnu in the form of Krishna. His devotion and piety won him the love and friendship of the great contemporary bhaktas and he became one of the most favoured followers of Sri Krishna Chaitanya.

#### EARLY LIFE AND DOINGS

From his childhood, Haridas was of a retiring disposition and as soon as he became capable of taking care of himself, he retired into a secluded part of the village of Buran, in the District of Jessore, in Bengal. His hut was surrounded with *tuler* plants and he passed his days and nights recounting the sweet name of Hari. It is here that he became celebrated for his unparalleled devotion and piety and, it is said, he made converts

and cured also several persons afflicted with loathsome diseases. He then removed to Fulia, near Santipur, where he became familiar with Adwaitacharya, a very devout Vaishnava Brahmin and scholar and a friend and follower of Sri Krishna Chaitanya. They became friends and lived and worshipped together.

#### HARIDAS AND CHAITANYA.

Haridas, soon afterwards, heard of the reputation of Sri Krishna Chaitanya and joined him at Nadia. That great and kind-hearted saint was struck with the devotion and faith of the low-born bhakta and embraced him saying that Devotion and Service to God knew no distinctions of caste or birth. He made Haridas one of his own followers and treated



hurried there to lead him in, but Haridas said, 'I am a low person, of no caste, and debarred from going to the Temple. If I can get a little retired space in the garden, I shall lie there and pass my time in loneliness, so that no servitor of Jagannath may have any occasion to touch me. This is my prayer.'

. . . Then Chaitanya came to receive Haridas who was chanting God's name in rapture. Haridas fell flat at the Master's feet, who clasped him to his bosom. Both wept in fervour of love—the Master overcome by the disciple's merits, and the disciple by the Master's. Haridas cried, 'Touch me not, Master, I am a low untouchable wretch!' But the Master answered, 'I touch you to be purified, because I lack your pure religion. Every

noment you acquire as much piety as by bathing in all holy places, or by performing sacrifice, austerities and alms-giving, or by reading the Vedas. You are holier than a Brahmin or Sanyasi.' So saying, he took Haridas into the garden and gave him a room all apart, adding, 'Live here, chanting God's name. Daily will I come and join thee. Bow to the discus on the top of the Temple of Jagannath (which you can see from here). The *prasad* will be sent to you here.' Nityanand, Jagadanand, Damodar and Mukunda rejoiced on meeting with Haridas. . .

'Then the Master carefully sent the *prasad* to Haridas by the hand of Govinda.'"

Haridas has indeed met with a kindlier fate than the one that befell his brethren in West

and South India Without being scorned or persecuted, he was loved and respected by the pious men of the age and lived in devout comradeship with them All honour to Sri Krishna Chaitanya who, with his eye of love, discerned the devotion and piety of Haridas and made him one of his own.

#### LIFE AT PURI

The centre and resort of the devotees and saints of this time was Puri. What Chidambaram was to Nanda and the South Indian devotees what Pandharpur was to the Maratha bhaktas, that was Puri to the monks and devotees of Bengal The city with its sea side temple had early in history become famous and attracted large numbers of pilgrims Year after year, they came in large numbers, bathe





religious processions, *bhajans* were frequently got up in which these devout men went dancing and singing through the streets. In the madness of their devotion to Jagannath, these bhakthas (including Chaitanya) sometimes took on themselves the duties of temple-servants—went and swept the temple-floor, washed the image or dragged the car. Indeed their religious ecstasy knew no bounds.

Such then are the features of the life which Haridas now led with his brother devotees at Puri. He sat at Chaitanya's feet and listened to his discourses. Or he joined the devotees in their *bhajan* parties and with them danced and sang. More often, he would retire into the privacy of his little hut, and there long sit and pray. Though his friends

and brother-devotees treated Haridas on equal terms, he never gave up the humbler position prescribed to his caste—he ate the *prasad* after all others had eaten and prayed to Jagannath standing far away from the temple gate. His eventful day at last drew to an end and he died somewhere before the year 1533, the year of the death of Chaitanya, amidst the tears of his devotees.

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## CONCLUSION

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Thus these saints lived, laboured and died  
Though born in the lowest of castes, though  
from birth fated to drag dead cattle and till  
lands they yet early caught glimpses of the  
Divine Light Their hearts opened out to  
devotion and faith They sang, preached, and  
prayed But the world would not let them live  
in peace The thought of low caste saints was  
too much for the orthodox and the high  
They were scorned, insulted and driven away  
from homes and temples But the saints  
flinched not Through persecution, through  
scorn and infamy, they stuck to their faith,  
followed the light that shone in their souls  
Nor did they bear any ill-will towards those

that persecuted them. The meekness, the devotion, and the perfect saintliness of them all make them indeed memorable for all time. Rich are the annals of our religion—rich in noble saints, great philosophers and epoch-making reformers. But these too, the pious and low born children of devotion, have their place in those annals. While Buddhas and Sankaras roll on like mighty rivers, these little streams too shall flow not unnoticed; the weary traveller or peasant may often turn to them and refresh himself in their pure waters.

The classes from which these saints came are still submerged in ignorance and misery. Their habitation is the poor hut; their life a prey to poverty and want. Temples they can-

not enter, nor sing hymns and pray. Their  
 Vandas and Chokamelas are silent. The  
 memory at least of these woe-stricken saints  
 should rouse us to a sense of our duty towards  
 these classes

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